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FREDERICK AUGUSTUS CONRAD MUHLENBERG,
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
IN THE FIRST CONGRESS, 1789.¹

BY OSWALD SEIDENSTICKER.

The same poetic justice which, at the close of the great drama, bestowed on the hero of the Revolution the civic crown in the very city that had, in 1776, witnessed his discomfiture, appears to have shaped also the destiny of the first Speaker of Congress, Frederick Augustus Conrad Muhlenberg. He, too, left New York, 1776, in distress, then a young preacher of pronounced rebel principles, cautioned by his friends to seek shelter outside of the doomed city, and he, too, returned in 1789, sent by the great State of Pennsylvania as one of her representatives, soon to be raised by his colleagues to the highest honor they could bestow,—the office of Speaker of the House.

His father was Rev. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, a man of rare endowments, who, amid untold difficulties, with endurance and noble self-sacrifice, carried out his great mission-work, earning for himself the honorable title of "Patriarch of the Lutheran Church in America."

Having received a call from the three congregations,—Philadelphia, Trappe, and New Hanover (the two latter situated in what is now Montgomery County),—he arrived in Philadelphia November 25, 1742, and soon after settled at the Trappe. On April 22, 1745, he married Anna Maria Weiser, a daughter of the famous Indian interpreter Conrad Weiser. This union was blessed with three sons and four daughters. The three sons have all left their mark in the life-work they carved out for themselves.

¹ For much information on the subject of this paper, drawn from original sources, the writer is indebted to Rev. F. A. Muhlenberg, D.D., and Rev. W. J. Mann, D.D., both of Philadelphia.

In obedience to the wishes of their father they entered the ministry, but only one remained faithful to his vocation. The eldest, Peter Gabriel, bore a conspicuous part in the war for independence; the second, the subject of this paper, Frederick Augustus, entered the service of the State, and became distinguished in the halls of legislation; Henry Ernest remained a clergyman, at the same time he was one of the pioneer botanists of America, and his labors in this field are held in grateful remembrance.

Frederick Augustus Conrad Muhlenberg was born at the Trappe, January 2, 1750. The Trappe is a German settlement where the German language has been preserved down to our day. The name is supposed to be a corruption of the German word *Treppe*, meaning staircase. This idea is brought out in a quaint manner on the monument erected there to Governor F. R. Shunk, which is surmounted by some steps, with the allegorical inscription, "I mount."

The three sons grew up under the care of their father, who devoted as much time to their instruction as his official duties would allow. He was, however, aware that, with the best intentions, he could not do justice to the requirements of a proper course of education. Nor did Philadelphia, to which place he removed in 1761, afford the desired facilities.¹ Hence he concluded to send his sons to Halle, in Germany, where, after the completion of his studies in Göttingen, he had pursued a practical course of preparation for the ministry under the guidance of Director Dr. Francke.

All arrangements having been completed, the three young German-Americans embarked April 27, 1763. They reached London June 15, and after some sojourn there arrived in Halle September 1. At that time Peter was fifteen, Frederick thirteen, and Henry eleven years old. The eldest did not remain long at Halle, but was indentured to Mr. L. H. Niemeyer,

¹ In a humorous letter to his brother Henry, written in 1780, Frederick Augustus speaks of the marvellous progress of his little son Henry, who could decline Latin nouns, *hic, hæc, hoc*, and even conjugate *amo*. "Brother," he adds, "if we had known as much when we went to Halle, what might have become of us?"

a merchant in Lübeck. The other two pursued their school and university studies for nearly seven years in a manner entirely satisfactory to their teachers. In 1770 they returned to the land of their birth, accompanied by their brother-in-law, Rev. John Christian Kunze. Before an examining board in Reading they gave sufficient proof of their qualifications (having among other things to translate Hebrew into Latin), and were—though not yet of age—ordained to the ministry October 25, 1770. The young Americans had become thoroughly imbued with German thought and feeling during their stay in Germany, and on their return they spoke German more fluently than English. As late as 1772, Frederick expresses, in a letter to his father, his regret that he did not master the English language as fully as he desired. German was, however, just then more necessary to him than English, as he had to conduct the service in the German language.

Near the end of 1770, Frederick, then twenty years of age, became assistant to his brother-in-law, Rev. Christian Emanuel Schulze, in Tulpehocken, Berks County, and also served the congregation in Shaeferstown. A few years later we find traces of his ministry in Salem Church, Lebanon.¹

What adventures and hardships would at that time occasionally fall to the lot of country parsons in the pursuit of their good calling cannot be better illustrated than by some extracts from Frederick Muhlenberg's account of a trip from Tulpehocken to Shamokin in the summer of 1771. (*Halbische Nachrichten*, p. 1385-1393.) There was at the latter place a little flock of German Lutherans without a church and without a minister, who, however, were not lost sight of, and, at times, provided with spiritual comfort. On such an errand our young minister set out upon his long and lonely ride through the wilds of the Blue Mountains and beyond.

¹ The following is an entry on the title-page of the Church records: "Church-book of the Evangelical Lutheran Congregation in Lebanon, Lancaster County, containing the record of baptisms, etc., begun by Frederick Augustus Conrad Muhlenberg, at this time minister here. Lebanon, May 1st, 1773."

He had one companion, though,—young Conrad Weiser, the son of Frederick, and grandson of Conrad Weiser, the interpreter. Leaving Tulpehocken on the 25th of June, 1771, they passed near the foot of the first ridge, Fort Henry, then in a quite dilapidated condition; many graves reminded them of the terrible times fifteen years ago. The steepness of the road, which resembled a mountain staircase, compelled them to dismount. Arriving by hard climbing at the top of the ridge, they were delighted with the beautiful outlook upon a wide tract of country; they could see Tulpehocken, Heidelberg, Mühlbach, and many other places. Descending, they found the road even more impracticable than before. At one o'clock of the first day they reached the bottom of the valley, and stopped at a miserable hovel, used as an inn. "Now," says Muhlenberg "the real wilderness began, for this was the last human habitation until we came to Shamokin." They crossed the Swatara three times, keeping upon an Indian path. At one of the most dangerous places, called the "Capes," the road, threading upon a rocky shelf of the mountain, had hardly the breadth of eighteen inches, being barred on the right by huge boulders and on the left by the steep bank of the Swatara. After having crossed the second ridge, also called the "Broad Mountains," with a good deal of difficulty and at some places with fear and trembling, they entered a dense forest of lofty pines, the property of a Philadelphian by the name of Flowers. It was 10 o'clock P.M. when they stopped to rest from their first day's journey. In the midst of a thick forest they let the horses graze where they pleased, after fastening bells to their necks, then built a fire to cook their supper and keep off the host of mosquitoes and the wolves that howled uncomfortably near them.

Continuing their journey the next morning, they were happy enough to find a breakfast waiting for them on the road. The carcass of a stag, that had been recently killed, hung fastened to a large wooden spit over a smouldering fire. It was then the common custom of travellers who had killed some game, to leave as much of it as they did not con-

sume themselves for the use of others, either in a cool stream near the road or fastened on a spit over a slow fire. Muhlenberg and Weiser helped themselves to a good piece and put the rest back in its place. At 11 o'clock A.M. they came to a spring of delicious water, which the Moravians had named Jacob's Well.

Having crossed the Mahanoy Mountain they arrived at the bank of the Susquehanna near Shamokin. On the opposite side was Caspar Reid's house, but no one happened to be in sight or within hearing to answer their call. At last a canoe rowed by two little girls came over; they put their baggage and the saddles in, and followed at first on horseback, and when that became impracticable, by swimming. The following night they spent at Caspar Reid's, a publican of the most liberal principles, who refused neither man nor dog the privilege of his only room. As a consequence of this indiscriminate hospitality, hosts of unbidden guests infested the unsuspecting sleepers, and the young minister had at dawn to strike for the woods in order to rid himself of the pest. Soon after they arrived at Benjamin Weiser's, the terminus of their journey. He lived on an island of about eight hundred acres, formed by the Susquehanna and Middle Creek. On the 28th, Muhlenberg visited a mountain near the Mahanoy River, where the Conestoga and Delaware Indians had suffered a defeat by the Six Nations. Many bones still lay scattered around. On the 30th of June a large crowd, consisting mainly of Lutherans, gathered for divine service. The porch of the house served as pulpit; the congregation assembled in front of it was protected from the heat of the sun by a number of saplings that were cut and stuck in the ground. Before the sermon Muhlenberg baptized eighteen children. The service in this wilderness—the motley crowd seated upon the ground and rising for prayer, their devout demeanor and chant—had a solemnity of its own, which much impressed the young preacher. Sixty persons took part in the communion. On the 2d of July the travellers returned to Tulpehocken.

Another incident of more permanent importance to the

subject of this memoir transpired during the same year. While on a visit to Philadelphia, Frederick had formed the acquaintance of Catharine, the youngest daughter of David Schäfer, a sugar refiner and elder of Zion's Church. Mutual affection led to a union for life. They were married October 15, 1771.

In the summer of 1773 the congregation of Conococheague, in Maryland, invited Frederick Muhlenberg through the Lutheran Ministerium to become their pastor. The request was not granted; in the same year, however, he accepted a call from a German congregation in New York, which had seceded from the old German Trinity Church (southwest corner of Broadway and Rector Street) and worshipped at the northwest corner of Frankford and William Streets. Their church was known as Christ or Swamp Church, and had been dedicated May 1, 1767.

The talented and eloquent Bernhard Michael Hausihl was at that time pastor of Trinity and, although a native of Germany, preached in English, while our Muhlenberg, born in this country, held divine services in German. At the outbreak of the Revolution another difference between the two men, destined to affect the whole tenor of their lives, manifested itself. Hausihl espoused the cause of the Tories, as his congregation did. His evil day came after the evacuation of New York. Frederick Muhlenberg, on the contrary, sided with the friends of freedom and gave full vent to the expression of his sentiments. His congregation were in perfect accord with him, and when he left, under the stress of the times, they insisted that he should return as soon as the storm blew over. When it became evident that the enemy contemplated to seize the city, his friends advised him to seek a place of safety for himself and family. In consequence he sent, in May, 1776, his wife to her parents in Philadelphia, where their third child was born. He followed July 2, two days before independence was declared.

What effect this great event had upon his mind, what thoughts and dreams of the future may have arisen within him, whether an inner voice whispered to him that he too

should be called to tender a hand in raising the temple of freedom, *quien sabe?* His elder brother, Peter Gabriel, had at that time already chosen his part. In January, 1776, he entered the pulpit in Woodstock, Virginia, for the last time, and, taking leave of his congregation, exchanged the clerical gown for the uniform of a colonel. At the head of his brave German regiment he had already, before the Declaration of Independence, received the baptism of fire on Sullivan's Island.

For Frederick, however, the time had not yet come. At present he was only a parson without a charge, the father of a family without the means of support, and his prospects were anything but cheering. He removed to his aged parents at the Trappe, where he arrived August 16. On the evening of the 23d, before a company of soldiers recruited in New Hanover, under command of Captain Richards, he preached a parting sermon on the text, "Be not ye afraid of them; remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses." (Nehemiah iv. 14.)

While assisting his father in his pastoral duties, he occasionally visited Philadelphia on horseback. Thus it happened that towards the end of the year 1776, when the cause of the Americans looked very dark, he was the bearer of the glad tidings to the Trappe of the surprise at Trenton. But in the following year the course of events took a most unfortunate turn. The enemy entered Pennsylvania, the battle of Brandywine was lost, and Philadelphia fell. Those were dark and anxious days for old Muhlenberg, his son, and their families. The din of war no longer was heard at a distance, but in the immediate neighborhood. On their retreat, after the battle of Brandywine, a part of the American army occupied the peaceful Trappe, a regiment of militia taking up their quarters in the church and school-house. When the enemy approached Philadelphia, Frederick hastened thither to convey his parents-in-law to the country, for David Schäfer had shown himself a stout friend of the Revolutionary party, and could expect no mercy from the

English. Among the many buildings wantonly destroyed during the occupation was also his sugar refinery.

Frederick Muhlenberg had during the year 1777 removed to the neighboring New Hanover (also called Falkner's Swamp), where he took charge of the Lutheran Church, and did good service in quelling dissensions of the congregation, which, by the way, was the oldest German Lutheran congregation in America, dating back to the beginning of the last century. From there he ministered to congregations in the hilly country of Oley, New Goshenhoppen, and for a time in Reading, until the church of the latter place was occupied for hospital purposes. A letter of Muhlenberg to his brother-in-law, Pastor Schulze, in Tulpehocken, bearing date New Hanover, September 30, 1777, gives a vivid picture of his situation.

After congratulations on the birth of a son, he says, "Our general (Peter Muhlenberg) is well. Yesterday Burckhard, Schäfer, and I slept with him in camp. The army stands ten miles distant from here, and three miles from the Trappe. All news, particularly the capture of Ticonderoga and Burgoyne's defeat, you will hear from the bearer. During the year I had untold trouble because of the army being here, and my house being filled with Philadelphians. I am still overrun with strangers. Our affairs will shortly wear a better aspect. Howe will probably not remain in Philadelphia a long time. As soon as I can I shall come to Tulpehocken. Papa and Mama are well. They are also overrun with people, as the Militia and a part of Lord Sterling's division lie encamped at the Trappe. However, thus far they have suffered no material losses."

From an entry in the elder Muhlenberg's diary we learn more exactly how many persons found lodgings in Frederick's small house. He writes, October 11, 1777, as follows: "My son F. came from New Hanover, but is very much discouraged, as he himself is a fugitive with wife, three children, maid and nurse, his brother's wife and child and Swaine and wife, make all eleven persons in one small house and with increasing scarcity of money and provisions."

Before Frederick Muhlenberg entered his thirtieth year he seriously considered the question of his future career. For nine years he had faithfully served in the ministry and yet not risen above depressing cares and petty concerns of life. Should his life be a failure? Should the powers of which he was conscious run to waste? The whole of his vigorous manhood lay yet before him, and now was the time to come to a decision, if he was to venture upon a new departure.

He took counsel with his good father, who could not, however, reconcile himself to the idea that his second son also should forsake the calling which in his eyes was the noblest and worthiest of all. But it was perhaps the very example which Peter had set that led Frederick to think of changing his profession. He, too, was anxious to serve his country, which had not yet emerged from its struggle for national and political liberty, and to devote himself to a career that satisfied his aspirations and tested his capabilities. His friends, particularly his father-in-law, were favorably inclined to further his plans, and to aid him in the pursuit of a laudable ambition. Thus, early in the year 1779, Muhlenberg concluded to resign his ministerial office and to enter political life.

The first step he took in this direction was to accept the candidacy as member to Congress. The Assembly of Pennsylvania had to fill three vacancies, and elected, on March 2, 1779, Frederick Augustus Muhlenberg, Henry Wynkoop, and J. McCleane. The term of the whole delegation expiring in the same year, an election was held in November, which resulted in the choice of Muhlenberg, James Searle, John Armstrong, James McCleane, and William Shippen, who took their seats on the 13th of November. On the same day Muhlenberg was put on the Committee on the Treasury, which goes to show that during the few months of his novitiate he had won the esteem and confidence of his colleagues. He now plunged with a will into the turbulent sea of politics, keeping all the time a calm head and an honest heart. He was not spared, as we shall see, sharp collisions and

bitter disappointments. Some of his experiences he details in letters to his younger brother Henry, then minister in Lancaster.¹ They are all written in German, dashed off in an easy, confidential style, sometimes with a tinge of frolicking humor and again "talking out of meeting" in terms that would be used only *sub rosa*. The first on hand is dated October 11, 1780, a time when Arnold's treason was the great sensation of the day. In it he says,—

"I received your last through Mr. Wirz, Jr., and will now answer the points of your letter, as far as I remember them, for I am writing in Congress. It is true, Arnold, the arch-villain, formerly had quite a number of friends in Congress, but their support was mainly due to the fact that he was against Pennsylvania. Moreover, New York hoped to employ him as Commander-in-chief against Vermont, the newly set-up State in their State. That is the reason why they supported him, though his speculating principles were detested. In spite of your misgivings I am pretty sure that the aspect of affairs is not exactly as you think. Nobody thought that he would go so far astray, though there was reason enough to detest his cursed avarice. As far as Pennsylvania is concerned, we were all the time intensely opposed to him. For this we were much blamed, now we stand justified. I hope, however, before the war is over, we shall get him into our hands, and give him his due as much as to Major André. Your remarks about the *yellow whigs* I fully endorse. I have never thought of supporting 'suspect,' moderate men, but the principle of the *yellow whigs*, to allow none that is not of their own stripe, to show his head, I take exception to, especially as they are more noisy than inclined to do real service. They care more for the

¹ They were kindly placed at the disposal of the writer by the Rev. F. A. Muhlenberg, a grandson of Henry E. Muhlenberg. Among these papers there is also a burlesque German poem in doggerel verse, congratulating Henry with mock solemnity upon the honorary degree of A.M. conferred upon him by the University of Pennsylvania, on July 4, 1780. The prose introduction is in Latin. The text is full of allusions to the "high old times" they had in Halle, and is followed by ludicrous foot-notes, mimicking the style of learned commentaries to classic writers.

emoluments than the welfare of the country. In general, it is sad to see that public spirit and virtue are more and more on the decline, while avarice, dissipation, and luxury are gaining the upper hand. Only our brave soldiers form an exception. With all their hardships, hunger, cold, and fatigue they remain steadfast and deserve all that is due to brave men. . . . Yesterday we had an election for Assemblymen, which brought out a strong vote, and this morning the result became known. Those chosen are Samuel Morris, by 870 votes; F. Muhlenberg, by 869; Robert Morris, by 649; Sharp Delany, 615; and John Steinmetz, 531. Dr. Hutchinson, Gurney and Kämmerer, who ran against us, had only between 2 and 300. Colonel Will is Sheriff. You may judge how much the Constitutionalists are disappointed that their ticket has been such a failure. At first they even wanted to fall back upon their former men, but that would not do at all. However, they have to be satisfied, and I hope, if the new Assembly will prove earnest, our internal affairs will soon be in better shape. Morris alone is able by his credit to appreciate our State money.

“But I am getting into a wide subject and must break off, especially as, at this moment, an important debate is going on in the house and I can hardly keep my mind on what I am writing. I shall keep my seat in Congress until the new Assembly will meet. We are quite anxious to learn how matters have gone with you. No question, the others have pushed the cart so deep into the mire that we shall have infinite trouble to move it back, and shall, in the effort, be much bespattered with dirt. The coffers are empty, the taxes almost unendurable, the people in bad humor, the money discredited, the army magazines exhausted, and the prospects to replenish them poor; the soldiers are badly clad, winter is coming, the enemy by no means to be despised, especially since the arrival of Rodney. Taking this and other things into account, public service might appear undesirable. However, let us once more take cheer and be steadfast, rely on God and our own strength, and endure courageously, then we shall after all be sure of

reaching our goal. The present Congress, believe me, consists of honest, brave, and—excepting myself—wise men, but the difficulties are innumerable and their power is by far too limited. I have often heard the present Congress compared with that of 1776 to the disadvantage of the former, but, at that time, it was no hard task; if they needed money, the sinews of war, the press had to keep silence, taxes were not imposed, and the country was not drained. If the same men were in our place, they would have to whistle to another tune. I have reasons to think that the Confederation will soon be ratified by the signing of Maryland, and then the outlook will be better.

“Our foreign affairs look very well. We have as one of the belligerent powers acceded to the proposals of the Emperor of Russia about the commerce of neutral powers, and our minister in France has received full powers to that end. Of this we expect, with good reason, considerable advantages. Again we are about to lay an impost on all imports and exports, likewise on prize-goods, so as to establish a permanent fund for hard money, aside of the tobacco which Virginia and Maryland must furnish. This falls upon the mercantile class, the poor will not feel it much. You see now in which way we expect to give credit to our new money, a part of the funds, which the several States establish, and how we hereafter intend to redeem the certificates. This will be done, the value being determined by the scale adopted by Congress, either in specie or in new money, at the option of the holder. At present we have, to be sure, no means to pay interest, for we can hardly raise money enough for the army and not so much as members of Congress coming from elsewhere need for their maintenance, but provision will be made within a short time and then you can get yours. I don’t know whether you will understand my letter: I listen to the debate, make anglicisms, and often write incoherently. Of such things I should prefer to write in English, if I were not afraid that the letter might fall into wrong hands.

“It just occurs to me that Father had a little conference at

the Trappe. Kurz, Voigt, Röller, Schmidt, and Ernst were there. The latter, I think, is ordained and will go to Easton. I should have liked to attend, but could not go. I have no horse, nor can I afford to keep one; moreover, I had no time. Believe me, I am not so well off now as when I left the Swamp [New Hanover], and if I had not been induced by the urgent appeals of the Germans to accept membership in the Assembly, a resolution in which the large majority of votes I received further confirmed me, I might have been tempted to take again to the apostolate. But I am here not my own master, and must be satisfied to serve where my fellow-citizens want me."

Among the charges intrusted to Frederick Muhlenberg in Congress was also that of chairman of the Medical Committee, by no means a sinecure; for, as he writes to his brother (September 6, 1780), he had to perform all the duties of the Director-General of the military hospitals.

Yielding to the pressure of his numerous friends, he had, as we have seen by the foregoing letter, accepted candidacy for the Assembly and been elected. It must have been owing to the good record he had made in Congress and to the great confidence which his character and his ability inspired that, though a new member and only thirty years of age, he was at the opening of the session (November 3, 1780) elected Speaker. To the same responsible position he was called by the two succeeding Assemblies (November 9, 1781, and October 31, 1782).

The final blow which virtually ended the attempts of the English to conquer and recover their former colonies, the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown, inspired Frederick, as we may expect, with most joyous feelings.

In a letter to his venerable father, who had followed the course of events with painful anxiety, he writes under date of October 24, 1781,—

"With heartfelt joy, with the utmost gratitude to the Almighty for his divine interposition, I do most sincerely congratulate you on the capture of Lord Cornwallis with his whole Army, amounting to 5500 land forces, 110 vessels, and

a prodigious quantity of Artillery, and this without much blood being spilled. I am, at present, in too great a hurry and confusion to give you the particulars, but shall do so by the first opportunity. Just now Congress, Assembly, and Council are about to proceed to our Zion's Church to return thanks to the Lord for this singular mark of interposition in our favor. Oh, may all the people rejoice in the Lord and return the most unfeigned and sincere thanks! In the next papers all the particulars will be given, as Col. Tilghman, of the General's Aides, arrived two hours ago."

This great achievement, with its magnificent results, did not, however, remove all difficulties, relieve all sores, or stop factional rancor. Bitter reproaches were launched against the Assembly, and hints thrown out that it harbored sinister designs. Frederick Muhlenberg took up the pen to expose and refute these slanderous insinuations, but, at the same time, a longing after the peace and tranquillity of private life appears for a while to have gained upon him. Of this mood a letter to his brother Henry testifies, from which some extracts are given here. It is dated February 20, 1782:

"I am glad that you like my articles.¹ The one in English was perhaps too studied; it was not written for everybody, but only for those who can judge of our political affairs. *Merks* has this week come out against me in a rather pig-gish reply, but I shall answer politely, and hereafter decline further discussion, if he continues throwing dirt. Do you know, it is Leuthäuser and Kämmerer? Sometimes my phlegmatic temper becomes a little ruffled, when I think of those asses; but mindful of Solomon's proverb I let the fools alone.

"I am now much wrapped up in politics, the more one is concerned with them, the deeper he is drawn in. But it is a comfort to think that this will be my last year and that, if my life is spared, I shall next year be released of public ser-

¹ The German articles of Muhlenberg appeared in the *Gemeinnützige Philadelphische Correspondenz* of February 13, February 20, and March 13, 1782. They are signed "Ein Deutscher." The English articles have not been discovered.

vice. It is settled that I go to the Trappe in April, where I expect to recuperate in the solitude and quiet of rural life. For, believe me, I have become faint in body and soul. Take my remark as you please, I assure you, I aim at nothing but the welfare of my country. Popularity I do not seek. The fool's praise or censure I do not mind."

In another letter, written a few months later (May 15, 1782), he expresses himself exceedingly well pleased with the first taste of the coveted retirement.

" . . . Yesterday I came down [from Trappe] to buy some goods. Now only, dear brother, I enjoy my life; it is true, in the sweat of my brow, yet far from the noise of the City and of the restless political life. Here I am not troubled with clients, petitioners, and the hundred other curious inquirers with whom my house in the City was all the time swarming; but I can comfortably attend to my work in the garden, the field, or the store,—my constitution begins to improve in the wholesome air. Next autumn there will be an end of my public office and then hail to me! Zacchæus!¹

We do not know what induced him to reconsider this resolution and to forego the surcease of public cares so longingly wished for. At all events, in the fall of 1782, he was re-elected into the Assembly, took his seat, and was at once again invested with the Speaker's office. Before his term had expired he was elected into the Board of Censors, a sort of grand jury on all matters pertaining to the government, the laws, and finance of the Commonwealth. He must have established a remarkably good record as presiding officer, for the Board of Censors also called him to the chair.

¹ Since 1781, Frederick Muhlenberg had a business interest both in Philadelphia and the Trappe. In Philadelphia, the firm Muhlenberg & Wegman, dealers in colonial goods, had their store in Second Street between Arch and Race. At the Trappe, Frederick Muhlenberg bought, in 1781, for eight hundred pounds, of Hermann Ried, a stone house and fifty acres of land. In 1791, if not earlier, he went into partnership with Jacob L. Lawersweiler to carry on a sugar refinery, 80 and 82 (O. N.) North Second Street. The firm existed until about 1800, when it failed.

Their sessions lasted from November 10, 1783, to September 25, 1784.

Upon some questions which then agitated the public mind, —*e.g.*, the expediency of calling a convention to change the Constitution of Pennsylvania, on equal representation, etc., —Frederick Muhlenberg expresses himself with refreshing unreserve in a letter to his brother, dated June 28, 1784, from which we give the following extracts :

“As to our political affairs, it is true the racket is over, but, as you say, the ‘boil is not ripe.’ The blind passion and mad party spirit of the common crowd, who, after all, cannot judge for themselves, are so strong and bitter that they would rather put up with three times as many defeats of the constitution than with a convention. But is this not a real aristocracy, when a few leaders of the party, by untiring effort manage to withhold from the people, of whom their power is derived, the people’s own power? Do they not betray a ridiculous fear that in a convention, based upon equal representation of the people (for such does not exist in Council), the people might alter the constitution? But the rascals know well enough, if the intelligent part of the people, and I assert also, if the majority of the people, were properly and equitably represented in the convention that a change would be the consequence and they be unhorsed.”

Muhlenberg continues in English :

“The principle of representation, which the constitution calls *the only* and *just* one, is the *Number* of taxables, without respect to property. I admire and fully approve of the principle as just, equal, and good. And it has been adopted by the State as far as respects the Assembly,—of course, every 700 Taxables, rich or poor, have one Representative in Assembly; for instance, Westmoreland County having 1500 Taxables, has two members in Assembly; Lancaster County, having near 8000 Taxables, has eleven Representatives in Assembly.

“But if the principle for Representation is good, which we admit, why did it not come into the wise noddles of those great framers of the Convention, to let that principle hold

good throughout every public body,—*e.g.*, why not in the Executive Council, and the Council of Censors? Is it just that 1500 Taxables in Washington, Bedford, Westmoreland, or other back counties, who, by the way have paid little or no Tax during this revolution, should have as much to say in the Council of Censors as 8000 from Lancaster, or 7000 from Philadelphia who bear the burthen of the State? All those back counties, although the number of Taxables is so inconsiderable, still have two members in our Council,—if this is not an absurdity in the Constitution, there never was one. Take the real number of Taxables each member of our Council represents and you have a great majority of the good people of the State for a Convention. And had Mr. W. from your county not displayed a double face, and spoke otherwise before the election than he does since, I know full well he never would have had a seat here.”

What follows is again German in the original :

“But what am I about? I just thought I was arguing with an Englishman in Lancaster,—and I confess on the subject of politics English comes easier to me than German,—and here I almost fall into a passion about my countrymen when I think of their dreadful credulity, envy, lack of sense, and hence their foolish peasant conceit. . . . If I had looked more to my own interest than to theirs, had I danced to their stupid whistling without consulting my judgment and my conscience, I might be a fogleman among them. . . .

“Whether we are going to make a new code? I do not think so. They have now the majority. Miles has resigned, and the City, the great, rich, populous City, has allowed Geo. Bryan, an archpartisan and brawler to be elected in his place. In these minor elections a culpable indifference prevails here. Bryan is one of the chief justices who by the Constitution is not to sit in Assembly or Council, receive no fee nor perquisite of any kind, etc., etc.; he was long time Vice-President, has not a farthing of real or personal property, lives in the Country, not in the City, and has nevertheless been elected Censor for the City. And such men are to investigate whether the Constitution has been kept invio-

late, whether the taxes have been properly imposed and collected, whether the laws have been properly executed!

“*Eheu! risum teneatis*,—in brief, the whole thing is a farce, costs the State five thousand or six thousand dollars, keeps the people in a ferment, and is not worth a farthing. I am ashamed to be a member, and if it might not be said, you forsook the vessel in the storm or you are afraid to weather it out, I would have resigned long ere this; perhaps I shall do so yet, for I can neither before God nor the world answer for thus wasting my precious time, robbing the State, and doing only mischief. The fellows from the back counties now hope to stay here till next October, to draw their 17/6, and to return home with a well filled purse; some of them will get at the end of the session more money than they ever had in their life. In short, dear brother, I am losing patience and draw a deep sigh at the corrupt political condition of our State.

“ . . . Nevertheless, to prove to you how readily the sentiments of the people change, imagine, in spite of all the calumnies and abuse behind my back, even here in Philadelphia County, the three districts of the County have applied to me with the inquiry, whether I would not serve them next year in the Assembly, but I have flatly refused. Henceforward I shall have nothing to do with public office. I am justice of the peace and can be serviceable to my neighbors. My store is doing well and is in good running order.

“One more question. Tell me your sincere opinion about ‘*Die freymüthigen Gedanken*,’ etc. [frank thoughts]. Will it be worth while, to have a few more of such pieces printed? To be sure, what is the use? The asses won’t understand it, though you figure it out to them ever so plainly, etc.”

Had Muhlenberg been inclined to return to the ministry, he would have had an opportunity in 1783, when the Lutheran congregation at Ebenezer, near Savannah, Georgia, consisting of Salzburg refugees and their descendants, offered him the pulpit that had been vacated by the death of Rev. Christian Rabenhorst. But his heart was set on returning once more to the localities endeared to him

in early childhood, to his beloved Trappe, the abode of his aged parents and of near relatives. The employment which his store, his farm, and his garden gave him left him still sufficient leisure to attend to several responsible but in no way harassing offices. On March 19, 1784, the Executive Council commissioned him justice of the peace for the district composed of Skippach, Perkiomen, Providence, and Limerick townships (he resigned January 14, 1789). When Montgomery County was erected, in autumn, 1784, the Assembly appointed him Register of Wills and Recorder of Deeds (September 21, 1784). At the first court that was held in Montgomery County (September 28, 1784) he presided. Thus several years passed to him quiet and uneventful.

In the mean time, the political aspect of the country entered into an entirely new phase. The foundation on which the government of the United States had been constructed proved weak and unsafe; the Articles of Confederation were replaced by the Constitution, which Congress submitted to the several States for ratification. To the Convention which Pennsylvania called for this purpose, F. A. Muhlenberg was elected member. In view of the passionate opposition threatened to undo the work of patriotism and wisdom, and holding firm convictions on the subject, he deemed it his duty to accept the important trust. The Convention met at Philadelphia, September 21, 1787, and its first business was the election of a presiding officer. By the sixty votes cast, Muhlenberg received thirty, Judge McKean twenty-nine, and Mr. Gray one. The question whether one-half of the votes constituted a majority was waived by passing the resolution to conduct Muhlenberg to the chair. Both he and his brother Peter, then Vice-President of Pennsylvania, exerted themselves earnestly in behalf of ratification. The Constitution having been accepted by a sufficient number of States, the new form of federal government went into operation. Under it Pennsylvania was entitled to eight representatives to the lower House. Among those elected with goodly majorities were Frederick and Peter Muhlenberg.

On March 4, 1789, the day set for the meeting of Congress in New York, no quorum was present, and it was not till April 1 that an organization of the House could be effected. Such was the prestige which attached to Muhlenberg's name that he was chosen Speaker. The respect and confidence thus shown him by the representatives of eleven States of the Union could not but be highly gratifying to him; at the same time his present position, under so wonderful a change of the surroundings, must, by contrast, have reminded him of the time when, as a fugitive, he left New York a marked man on account of his republican principles.

He was also a member of the House of the Second, Third, and Fourth Congresses. In the Third Congress he was again elected Speaker—this time as candidate of the Antifederalists or Democrats (then called Republicans)—over Sedgwick, the Federalist candidate. He took part in a debate on the taxation of sugar refined in the United States, upon which an excise of two cents per pound was to be laid. Muhlenberg strenuously opposed this measure as a blow against domestic industry, but in vain.

In the Fourth Congress, Jay's treaty became the subject of a very animated discussion; the Senate, however, ratified it on June 24, 1795, and it received the President's approval. Again very hot and protracted debates ensued in the House of Representatives when the resolution was offered to grant an appropriation for carrying out the provisions of the treaty. The President was requested by a resolution to place before the House all instructions, correspondence, etc., which had reference to the treaty, because there was an impression afloat that the branch of Congress representing the rights of the people had been ignored. Washington replied politely but firmly, declining to grant this request, as the House of Representatives had nothing to do with the conclusion of treaties. This news was handed over to the Committee of the Whole, of which Frederick Augustus Muhlenberg was the chairman. After a long and stormy

debate, the vote was taken, April 29, 1796, on the resolution of granting the appropriation. There were forty-nine votes for and as many against it. Upon Muhlenberg now rested the very responsible duty of giving the deciding vote, and although not perfectly satisfied with the treaty as it had been expressed, he cast it in the affirmative. Had he voted differently serious complications might have resulted. The question now came before the House, and was favorably acted upon by a vote of fifty-one against forty-eight.

The acceptance of Jay's treaty was denounced by its adversaries as a base surrender of American interests to the arrogant and wily foe. But Muhlenberg, in deciding as he did, was guided solely by the considerations of the statesman who looks to the welfare of his country. When, soon afterwards, the party lines were drawn between the Federalists, who were charged with servility to England, and the Republicans or Democrats, who sympathized with revolutionary France, Frederick Muhlenberg, as well as his brother Peter, stood on the side of the latter. Both used their influence in favor of the Democratic party, as John Adams, not without some bitterness, remarks, "These two Muhlenbergs addressed the public with their names, both in English and in German, with invectives against the administration and warm recommendations of Mr. Jefferson."

After the adjournment of the Fourth Congress, Muhlenberg withdrew from active political life. In the autumn of 1799 the place of Collector-General of the Pennsylvania Land Office became vacant by the removal of the incumbent for malfeasance. Muhlenberg was appointed to this place by the recently-elected governor, Thomas McKean, in the beginning of the year 1800. He removed to Lancaster, which in 1799 had become the seat of the State government. Once more in a position to enjoy the genial company of his beloved brother Henry, minister at the Lutheran church in Lancaster, he, no doubt, looked forward to a happy and comparatively quiet life. But he was not long granted this boon. Death ended his earthly career on June 4, 1801, before he had completed his fifty-second year.

The fact that Frederick Muhlenberg was on so many occasions chosen to preside over deliberating bodies to which the people had elected him may be taken as evidence of his readily discerned and proven fitness, in which his character and temper as well as his abilities had a share. Also in other walks of life he was sought as a safe and judicious counsellor. The University of Pennsylvania he served as trustee from 1779 till 1786. The Rev. John Christian Hardwick (Hartwig) appointed him by his last will trustee and president of a society for the propagation of the gospel, to be founded according to the provisions of the will,—a charge he could not carry out because he died before the difficulties that retarded the execution of the will were overcome. The German Society of Pennsylvania, of which he became a member in 1778, elected him their president in 1789 and again in the years following till 1797, when, on account of removal from the city, he declined a renomination. The society also expressed to him in a formal manner their thanks for help rendered in procuring their charter in 1781, when he was Speaker of the Assembly. Altogether, the Germans of Pennsylvania looked upon Frederick Muhlenberg as one of their own people, and a leader they might be proud of, while he never stooped to improper methods to curry their favor. Of the great power that he and his brother had over them, John Adams querulously says, "These two Germans, who had been long in public affairs and in high offices, were the great leaders and oracles of the whole German interest in Pennsylvania and the neighboring States. . . . The Muhlenbergs turned the whole body of the Germans, great numbers of the Irish, and many of the English, and in this manner introduced the total change that followed in both Houses of the legislature, and in all the executive departments of the national government. Upon such slender threads did our elections then depend!"

A personal description of the man, his ways and bearing, is not at hand. The portrait which accompanies this sketch gives the impression of firmness, dignity, and a calm, well-

balanced mind. But it hardly betrays the vein of humor he possessed, of which his letters bear unmistakable evidence.

We close with a short notice of his family. That he was married to Catharine Schäfer, daughter of the sugar refiner, David Schäfer, has already been mentioned. His children were: Maria, married to John S. Heister; Henry William, married to Mary Sheaff; Elizabeth, married to John H. Irwin; Margareth, married to Jacob Sperry; P. David, married to Rachel Evans, daughter of Oliver Evans, Esq.; and Catharine, married to George Sheaff.